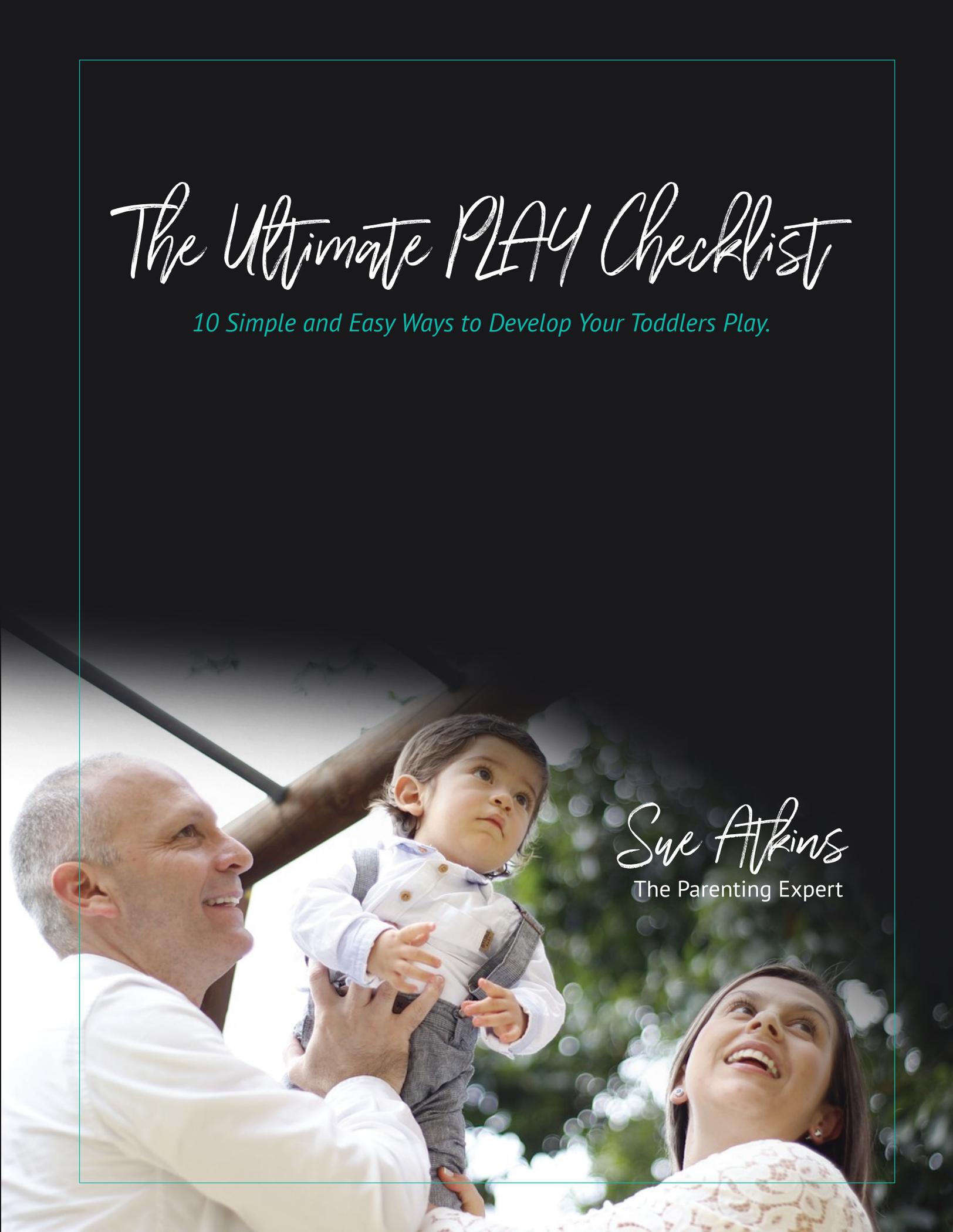


# The Ultimate PLAY Checklist

*10 Simple and Easy Ways to Develop Your Toddlers Play.*



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## 10 Simple and Easy Ways to Develop Your Toddlers Play.

### **The importance of play in your children's development**

There's a great deal happening during playtime. Little ones are lifting, dropping, looking, pouring, bouncing, hiding, building, knocking down, discovering, exploring, and gaining dexterity and kinaesthetic experiences.

They are learning key scientific concepts, such as what sinks and floats; mathematical concepts, including how to balance blocks to build a tower; and literacy skills, such as trying out new vocabulary or storytelling skills as children "act out" different roles.

And when your toddler plays with you, they are also learning — that they are loved and important and that they are fun to be around.

These social - emotional skills give them the self-esteem and self-confidence they need to begin loving and supportive relationships all their lives.

Play comes in all shapes and sizes. It is really easy to wake up and find your house resembles a toy shop full of toys from Hamleys!

It can be chaotic and over stimulating as there are often missing or broken pieces, too many plastic toys as well as too many worn out toys and old favourites.

I've been there, done that, got the T-shirt !

It is not easy to keep your cool when they say they are bored and you see hundreds of toys and activities scattered all around your house that they can do but instead they are whining for something else or basically your attention.

Keeping your child playing well takes time and changes as they grow.

Each child in your family is different not just because of age or gender but because of temperament too.

But I think establishing a "play habit" works well if everyone is on board with it and the play

Instead of encouraging you to buy more things I want you to look at what you can do with what we already have in your homes and extending and expanding play with that.

### **Developing good play habits and keeping it simple.**

It's all about long term gain with a little bit of effort up front first and developing play habits that will pay off in the long term with a little input from the beginning.

My kids loved simple, basic toys and used to play happily for ages with saucepans, wooden spoons and the colander!

And I'm a great believer in using simple toys from things you can re-use – like toilet roll cardboard, cereal boxes, and the wonderfully colourful sweet wrappers from something like "Quality Street." These can all be used in collages and paintings and are so simple to organise if you just have a way to systematically store them in a cupboard.

Just get creative and find your own ways to make toys and activities and be led by what your child likes to do as your child plays from many sources.

As a former Reception Class teacher of 5 year olds I discovered that children need a lot of access to the basics. Their whole learning foundation depends upon it. So set this up now as your toddler is so receptive to learning and foster a love of play and encourage their natural curiosity to learn in different ways.

This will have a wonderful influence on the way they handle the multi-media cyber world of play too – which can close older children down, isolate them and teach them to be passive as they sit for hours on their Play Station.

Your child will be different as they will know how to occupy themselves and use their own resources to entertain themselves – and while we all embrace change and the Internet – it's ALL about balance .

So, start now to teach your children how to use their imagination and give them a wonderful creative gift for life.

Remember less is more for your toddler.

Most kids today are not short of toys!

There's noise, colour, different textures and over stimulation and overload everywhere. So, have a plan with your toddler's toys and play experiences and build in variety and simple choices from the beginning.

- I used to box up and rotate the kid's toys to keep them fresh, new and exciting and I remember them playing for hours at their Grandparents house with an old train station toy that was their Dad's when he was a boy. That was a magic moment actually seeing them playing so happily with their Dad's old toys.

- Another tip is to only have out a few toys at a time.

Having too many toys or access to too many things just encourages flitting from one thing to another without developing your child's concentration and tenacity – skills they will need to develop at school to help them learn to read and write .

So reduce the amount of toys and activities you put out for them and give them a chance to work on ideas and discover what pulling this lever actually does!

- Allow your child to experiment with their toys by getting familiar with them and they will come back and try new things and accept that they may play with some toys in their own unique way

REMEMBER that over stimulation encourages button pushing and not exploratory play.

And encourage your toddler to play independently.

And don't be afraid to reject toys that you don't like or find fun or useful for learning. Trust your own intuition and be guided by what feels right for you and be guided what feels right for your child. Send those toys you don't like off to the Charity shop for somebody else to play with.

Provide a rich environment of toys

Children play with anything so try not to limit their play to only the bought toys.

Grab a pen and paper and maybe a cup of coffee and get in amongst your toddler's toys and evaluate the type of toys you have.

What is my child learning from playing with this?

What experiences will my toddler have touching this?

What part of my child's imagination is this toy stimulating?

How is this toy improving their dexterity?

Have they got too many toys all at one time- what can I do to create interest, variety but also concentration and tenacity?

Is there a wide variety of different types of toys?

Are they a bit gender specific and predictable?

What's the message I'm giving my toddler about playing with this toy?

Have they grown out of this toy?

Is it too old for them at the moment?

What do I want my child to learn from playing with this toy?

### **Home made things to play with.**

There are many things you can make that children learn from and enjoy and often the value of these types of toys is widely under valued and overlooked.

Don't fall into the trap mistakenly believing that the more you spend the better it is for your child.

Playdough and plastic scissors, mini rolling pins and biscuit cutters- all from your kitchen are great toys so just get creative about what you offer your toddler to play with.

Go outside .....

Go outside to play with gardening tools to plant, manipulate and dig with, play with different sized balls for dexterity to help with throwing and just go for a good old fashioned walk.

One of my books for toddlers is called Are we there yet? The magic of looking under stones and finding fairies book (which you can buy by clicking on the link) and was based on walking down the road with my son Will when he was 3 years old in Gravel Hill in Surrey as we chatted about the things we saw and as we looked under stones and talked about fairies. It inspired me to write a book about giving toddlers self esteem, discipline, fairness, boundaries and love. The book is all about enjoying the magic of childhood and creating the memories of an adult.

Be present

For me the time of my children's toddlers' years was magical and full of memories that I treasure.

Whatever their age, moments of time when you give them your complete attention is what they crave and need more than anything.

We live in a very busy, hectic world full of fast moving, instant gratification but toddlers aren't like that and I don't want you to miss out on this special time with your children.

They really do grow up very quickly – even if you are exhausted at the moment with tantrums or tiredness – keep the bigger picture in your mind and it will help you to relax and enjoy the moment.

You are building memories – one memory at a time, so make them positive.

You don't want your child to look back on their growing up years feeling rushed, hurried and stressed do you?

## **Attention spans**

Children have very varied attention spans. Some are better than others even whether they are boys or girls – whatever the experts say!!

Start where your child is at and spend time with them watching their play, interacting and joining in, and sitting on the sidelines but encouraging and praising them easily.

Children love to please you, feel you notice them and love to spend time with you. So you will be building their self esteem and self confidence really easily just by doing this.

When your child comes tugging at you to play just stop and play for a few minutes. It will show your toddler that you respect them, love them, are interested in them and keen to engage and play with them.

Here's a blog I wrote using this simple technique that you can read here: <http://sueatkins1.wordpress.com/2010/10/31/in-a-minute/>

I bet you've had your child ask you many times to read a book or play a game and I bet you've said, "In a minute."

This usually sets you up to forget the request and you may end up not doing what you told your child you would do, which damages your relationship and the trust between you in the long term.

So why not try this little strategy next time think:

"For a minute" and go over and interact with your child "For a minute."

Magically, when you do this, you will find yourself there for more than a minute and you will have filled up their need for your attention quickly and easily – Simple !

Children won't remember what you said but they will remember how you made them feel.

So just develop this habit and if you are busy also explain that, but make a special time and note, to STOP what you are doing and give your toddler your undivided attention. As they will learn to trust what you say and that you always keep your word, and will be less demanding as they know you WILL come and play with them for a certain time each day.

So, get into a routine and a habit which makes it much easier for you to remember to play with your toddler.

I found adding a routine to our play times really helped. I found after I had fed Molly (when she was just a baby) after breakfast, Will and I could play together and it was our "special time" as the baby went to sleep.

Then I did the same for Molly as she grew up when Will was watching his "Postman Pat" video we would have our "special time" together. They both had their special "play time" with my whole attention.

I found this nipped in the bud any sibling rivalry early on ..... and is one thing I teach parents about on my workshops and in my Banishing the bickering audio CD and ideas book which you can buy by clicking on the link.

But don't let guilt and worrying stop the fun you both can have together. Some days will be better than others. There will be high times of laughter and low days of tears.

Play at their level. Sit on the floor and push cars around, if this is what they want and try not to be too controlling or always educational. Just join in, have fun and relax.

It's about them not you !!

Adding value and learning to their play.

When I cook spaghetti bolognaise I cook it the same way.

I get out the fresh spaghetti, chop the tomatoes, onions, oregano and garlic, bring the spaghetti to the boil add a pinch of salt. I throw a strand on the wall to see if it's cooked and sticks and drain the water then put it all together in a large serving dish for the family to help themselves.

I've got into a rut!

Babies and toddlers get stuck in a spaghetti bolognese rut too !  
As they can so easily stay with the familiar and safe and enjoying the toys they usually play with in the same way.

They need help to try out the Gordon Ramsay way of cooking it or the Jamie Oliver!!  
So just think about gentle and simple ways you can add a bit of variety and take your child out of their comfort zones when they play.

## **Create different play situations**

Toddlers are easily bored if they have only one way to play with most of their toys.

So look for open ended toys that encourage free expression and creative play and will encourage your toddler to be curious and will make them use their own imagination to think of the next best thing to do with the toy.

Introduce books as early as you can with your baby or toddler – point to the pictures, point left to right under the words so they begin to learn the way to read across the page, talk about the characters and ask your toddler open ended questions about what they see or hear. As this all develops their reading readiness and love of books ready for school later on.

Encourage your little one to join a Toddler class like Talking Tots

Tumble Tots or Jo Jingles or any local classes in your area to learn to play and socialise easily and naturally in a fun environment.

Take them on visits to museums, farms or nature trails and talk with them about what they see, what they hear and how they feel or notice!

I believe the Internet, DVDs and TV all provide rich sources of great information if you use them sparingly when your toddler is young. Don't use them as a babysitter or as an excuse for you to plunk them down for hours in front of the box while you phone your friends or do the ironing!

### **Keep it all age appropriate, challenging and fun.**

A useful website for this is Common Sense Media where editors have made it easy with their handpicked list of the best kids' websites and online games for children chosen for their overall quality and age appropriateness.

Fun and free, these are destinations that you can approve of for your toddler. It's a big world on the web, and these lists help you keep your children safe. So go to the [Common Sense Media Website](#) to explore.

Here's a fun idea – the "I'm Bored" Jar.

It takes a little time but it is totally worth it.

You write down all the games and activities your toddler loves to do and then cut up the list (which you can continually just keep adding to) and pop them into a "I'm bored jar" to pick out on those days and moments when they say the dreaded words ..... "I'm bored" But this actually leads me into another passion of mine ..... allowing your kids to be bored sometimes!!

We are so used to things being faster, quicker and more and more exciting that we may have lost the ability to allow our children to be bored sometimes.

Boredom is a part of life and you are teaching your toddler how to handle this very important part of life by learning to entertain themselves sometimes.

There are a great many books, web sites, and training courses today more or less dedicated to the idea that being bored is a major sin, and that the only cure is to find ways to be busy and productive every waking moment.

People who follow this idea are constantly on-the-go and often really stressed because any feelings of boredom get quickly smothered with yet more activity....

Yet boredom is, in reality, crucial to any ability to be truly productive, relaxed and positive as well as being far more effective and happy.

So just pause for a moment and ponder if you're flat-out busy and engaged all the time, as you are unconsciously passing this on to your toddler?

And ask yourself is that something you are happy to pass on?

There's an interesting article to read on how boredom can be good for you and your toddler and to read it click on => [Boredom can be good for you](#)

### **Encouraging friends over to play.**

Whatever the age of your child, having friends over to play will change and really enhance the way they interact and play with others. It will develop your toddler's social skills, their sociability, and overcome any possible shyness. It will also help your toddler with the ability to share toys and make compromises naturally with you around to guide them.

New people bring new ways and new experiences of ways to play.

It's all about collaborative play not competitive play.

Dressing up, sharing jigsaws, sharing Lego and sharing ideas.  
Limiting TV and DVDs

Once the TV is on it can be very hard to turn it off.

We all enjoy chilling out in front of the box sometimes but small children can't regulate themselves and need you to set firm, fair and consistent boundaries for them until they are old enough to self-regulate themselves much later on.

So one simple way to do this is to have a couple of simple rules that you and your toddler and family all understand and let your toddler know clearly what happens if they break these rules.

Then everyone knows where they are and that creates less friction, arguments and tantrums.

### **TV, iPads and technology makes toddlers very passive.**

So get grounded, confident and clear about what is and what isn't acceptable to you and stick to that!

### **Brothers and sisters**

Older siblings who just want to help often "take over" and knock down carefully and lovingly built castles or scribble on masterpieces.

So take the time and energy to teach your older child about respecting their younger toddlers creations and drawings and toys.

### **Quiet time**

When I was a class teacher we used to have "Quiet Time" each day at a certain time to give the children a bit of "Me Time"

It's worth remembering that every child needs quiet moments to themselves to relax, ponder, chill out and have a bit of quiet me time.

It recharges their batteries, allows children to pause , reflect and make sense of their day and to enjoy just " being."

Also quiet time gives everyone a break from each other – being at home all day can drive you all a bit stir crazy – no matter how old you are !!

It's ALL about BALANCE!

## **The importance of make believe.**

Why is play essential for child-development?

Regular play not only shapes happy children but also builds essential “real-world” skills such as cooperation, social coping skills, negotiation skills as well as critical thinking skills.

But how exactly does building a castle out of bed sheets instead of watching TV build and develop those skills?

Well, make-believe requires your toddler to be proactive and to use their creative imagination and not just be passive, reactive and a bystander in the playing process.

Pretending is in danger of running out of steam if you as a parent don't encourage it in your toddler. Times have changed from 50 years ago due to four factors.

- The first is stranger danger. These days, kids are inside more and it's not just because they are less active. Nowadays many parents fear the unknown “danger” outside their homes.
- The second barrier is the availability of technology and games. Walk into any toy shop and you will be surrounded by toys that talk and dance on their own. It's like the toy is having all the fun but it's not giving your toddler the chance to be creative.
- A good toy is 90% child and 10% toy.
- Additionally, today's society emphasises structure. Parents today are told to keep kids busy rather than allowing them free time to play. Did you know that the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child lists play as a guaranteed right, next to access to nutritious food and clean drinking water?
- Also creative play's biggest obstacle is commercialisation.

Media and marketing messages from toy manufacturers convince you and your children that they need toys in order to play and be creative.

According to research the average child spends 40 hours a week engaged in electronic media after school. That equates to more than five hours a day of non-creative play!

So as the parent of a toddler, what can you do to convert some of these lost hours into make-believe minutes?

Grab a piece of paper and get jotting down some ideas.

(Perhaps you could give your toddler tools to create with, rather than toys to play with.)

Set yourself some play goals for your kids and help them develop this very important skill.

It is through exploring their creativity as children that people like Ricky Gervais, Zandra Rhodes, Steven Spielberg, Beethoven, Einstein or Leonardo Da Vinci were allowed to shine.

For more ideas on how to play with your child:

Go to the excellent [Raising Playful Tots](#) website for more ideas and inspiration.

Until next time – learn, laugh and enjoy the adventure,

*Sue Atkins*  
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